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DATE 1/22/09
HB 248

HB248 Require party designation at voter registration
House State Administration, RM 455
January 22, 2009 @ 8 AM
Secretary Linda McCulloch's Remarks

Good morning Mr. Chair, members of the committee.
For the record, I am Montana Secretary of State Linda McCulloch.

I am here today to respectfully oppose House Bill 248, an act requiring an elector to declare a political party affiliation or to declare to be unaffiliated when registering to vote.

As elected officials, party affiliation is a something we have to register when filing for office. However, Montana voters are not candidates for public office and a significant number of Montanans do not consider themselves to belong formally to a political party.

One of my responsibilities as the state's chief election official is to ensure that Montanans not only cast their vote, but that they cast an *informed* vote. No voter should ever be forced to vote based solely on party affiliation. No voter should ever be pigeonholed in a primary. And no Montanan should ever be denied the opportunity to vote for the candidate of their choice.

Adding any pressure to affiliate with a political party also contradicts my responsibility to uphold the integrity of Montana's elections. When an elector becomes more concerned with party affiliation rather than investigating the credentials of a candidate, elections suffer.

I worry that any affiliation in registration opens the door to a flood of potential problems, including rights to privacy and political profiling.

For example, in Florida many electors were shocked and appalled that their party affiliation was clearly marked on their return absentee ballot envelopes, a clear invasion of their right to cast their votes privately in the comfort of their own home.

Once states start collecting this type of data in addition to the gender, date of birth and residency data that is already collected, can this

Legislature guarantee that no-one will use the information inappropriately?

A few years ago in California, the Secretary of State launched a task force to research the state's declining voter turnout rates—and concluded that political profiling, in whatever form, was likely contributing to the declining number of voters.

If we are to ensure fair, honest and accurate elections in the state of Montana, we must maintain voters' rights to privacy by not requiring them to publicly choose a party affiliation when they register to vote.

Thank you for your time.